REMARKS

1. In the above-captioned Office Action, the Examiner rejected claim 5 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph. Claims 1, 4, 6, 7, and 19 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) in view of Inciong (U.S. Patent No. 6,543,787). Claims 1-20 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) given Belter (U.S. Patent No. 5,168,047) in view of Farnam (U.S. Patent No. 3,811,689). These rejections are traversed and reconsideration is hereby respectfully requested.

2. Claim 5 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph. Claim 5 is cancelled above, and the subject matter thereof is included in claim 1.

3. Claims 1, 4, 6, 7, and 19 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) in view of Inciong.

Inciong teaches use of a waffle pattern region (32) that is provided around an aperture (22) to "seal in a narrow circular sealing space 60" [column 3, lines 15-17]. The narrow circular sealing space 60 (shown in Inciong's FIG. 2) is a flat space lying outside of and parallel to the aperture (22). For the waffle pattern region (32) to seal against the narrow circular sealing space (60), material making up the waffle pattern region (32) has to compress against the narrow circular sealing space (60) (last full paragraph of column 3).

Therefore, Inciong teaches axial compression of elastomeric features in his gasket, and does not teach nor imply having *a fastener that is disposable within the opening* and *radially compressing the elastomeric ring between the fastener and the opening when the fastener is inserted in the elastomeric ring* as stated in independent claim 1 as amended above. Inciong does not teach or suggest retaining fasteners with an elastomeric ring of a gasket.

Hence, claim 1, and claims 4, 6, 7, and 19 that depend therefrom, are distinct over Inciong and may be passed to allowance.

4. Claims 1-20 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) given Belter in view of Farnam.

Belter teaches a gasket for sealing between two opposed surfaces that includes a rigid carrier (12) that is bonded with a flexible sealing element (14). Belter does not teach nor show having any segment of the flexible sealing element (14) surrounding any of

the apertures (48) that are distributed around the rigid carrier (12) and accommodate the passage of clamping bolts therethrough. Belter provides no motivation for retaining fasteners in the apertures (48).

Farnam teaches installation configurations for preformed bushings in laminated insulator gaskets. Farnam uses bushings, or insert members (24), that "are of a high strength low thermal conductivity material so as to retain the proper size for the bolt hole, as well to support the flange claiming loads of the heat insulating structure" [column 2, lines 47-51]. Farnam does not reach deformation of an elastomeric ring for retention of a fastener, in fact, Farnam teaches the opposite since the insert members (24) are made of a high strength material so as to retain the size of the bolt hole.

Therefore, any combination of Belter and Farnam would not yield the invention as claimed. The combined teachings of the two references cited by the Examiner do not teach either of:

a) *radially compressing the elastomeric ring between the fastener and the opening,* as stated in independent claim 1 as amended above;

b) having a ring that *has an inner diameter that is smaller than both the inner diameter of the fastener opening and the outer shaft diameter of the fastener, such that the fastener is retained with the gasket when the fastener is inserted in the elastomeric ring,* as stated in independent claim 8 as amended above; or

c) *wherein the first elastomeric ring has an inner ring diameter that is smaller than the outer shaft diameter,* and *wherein the second elastomeric ring has an additional inner ring diameter that is smaller than an additional outer shaft diameter of an additional fastener* as stated in independent claim 13 as amended above.

With respect to dependent claims 6, 10, and 16, neither Belter nor Farnam teaches or suggests that when the fastener is inserted through the fastener hole and the elastomeric ring, the gasket and fastener are sufficiently attached to the flange to permit installation of the fastener without the gasket and fastener falling off the flange. Neither of these references teaches or suggests this element and moreover, this element would be impossible to achieve with the teachings of Belter and/or Farnam. With respect to claims 19 and 20, neither Belter nor Farnam teaches or suggests an interference fit.

Thus, the claims of the present invention are not taught or suggested by Belter and/or Farnam. Combining these references fails to teach or yield the invention as claimed.

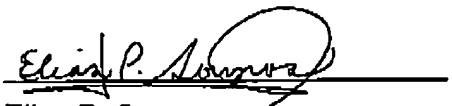
The combination of these references fails to teach or suggest all the elements of the claims. Further, one of skill in the art would not be motivated to make such a combination. Therefore, the present invention is not obvious in light of any combination of Belter and/or Farnam.

Furthermore, claims 2-4, 6-7, 9-12, and 14-20 are dependent upon an independent claim that is shown to be allowable. For all these reasons, the dependent claims are themselves allowable.

Hence, the applicant respectfully submits that claims 1-20 may be passed to allowance.

5. The Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone or facsimile if the Examiner believes that such a communication may advance the prosecution of the present application. Notice of allowance of claims 1-20 is hereby respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: July 13, 2006 By: 

Elias P. Soupos
Registration No. 57,375
Agent for Applicant
Voice: (708) 865-4178
Fax: (708) 865-3474